



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



Ga 113.327.3

Harvard College Library



GIFT OF

THE AUTHOR

Ja 113.327.3

Cover

#

The RELIGIOUS FUNCTION
of COMEDY

A Phase of the Problem of Evil, treated from the
Point of View of Aristotle's *Poetics* and
Metaphysics and of Spiritual Monism

An Essay based on a Lecture delivered before the Philosophical
Society of the University of Toronto, 1907.

BY

J. D. LOGAN, A.M., Ph.D. (Harvard)

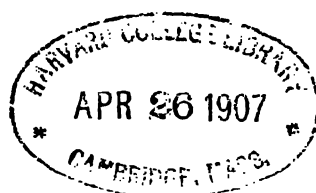
Formerly Professor of English and Philosophy in the State University of South Dakota;
Author of "The Structural Principles of Style," Etc.



TORONTO:
WILLIAM BRIGGS
1907

Price, 25 cents.

Ca. 113.327.3



*Harvard College
Cambridge, Mass.*

The Religious Function of Comedy*

Philosophical solutions of the problem of evil have nothing to do with conceptions of how the universe is managed. These may be left to the ingenious inventors of pleasant or comforting cosmologies. The most philosophy can do is to explain the world-processes, that through the perfect understanding of them men may accept reality and its laws with courage, and, in the face of pain, defeat, and death, pursue their ideals with faith and cheerfulness.

On its strictly moral side the problem of evil is easily solved by objective idealism. But there is another aspect of the problem, which philosophical idealism either has ignored or regarded as unsolvable. This is the phase which Aristotle categorized under the concept of *τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον*, the element of misfortune in human affairs and of brute caprice or lawlessness in nature's processes.† The possibility and function of moral evil men may understand. They may meet it in the open, thwart it or destroy it. But *τὸ αὐτόματον*, more than human sin, and more than *τύχη* (best translated in this connection by "hard luck"), confounds the minds of men and causes them to rise up and cry: There is no God.

* This essay does not differ from its original form as a lecture except by a few slight verbal changes and the addition of the foot notes.

† *Met.* A 3. 1070a8; *Phys.* II. 8. 198b23. Cp. *Phys.* II. 6. 197a36; b29 and II. 8. 198b1.

The Religious Function of Comedy

Modern explanations of the origin and function of *τὸ αὐτόματον* merely change the phraseology of the problem. The quasi-evolutionism of Tennyson or of John Fiske, for example, seems to justify the ways of God to man, until we reflect that even if evolution is the method of the Deity, the question still remains, How can the horrible waste and destructiveness of evolution itself be explained and justified? Compromises between theism and evolutionary science, in which the Deity is still conceived as an omnipotent power employing the method of development, must always face the unreasonable discrepancy between the Deity's ideals and the process of their realization. In these post-Darwinian compromises, *τὸ αὐτόματον* appears over again as failure in economy of means. We shall do far better to return to Aristotle. In his system *τὸ αὐτόματον* is the *στέρσις* of *φύσις*. *Φύσις* itself is much more than any mere evolutionary process. It is the self-organizing principle of nature, both the process and the end.* The ultimate ideal of *φύσις* is to realize absolute perfection of being, represented as the resting-being of the Deity. In this process, it happens, *φύσις* often miscarries, not only failing to produce perfectly what was intended, but positively producing *τέρατα*, not intended. It is possible, then, from Aristotle's point of view, to explain and justify *τὸ αὐτόματον*. In his system the Absolute stands over against Nature, not as an omnipotent power, but as omniscient, in no wise interfering with the world-processes, save as their ultimate ground or final cause. *Φύσις*, with Aristotle, is frankly imperfect; and lacking omniscience, inevitably fails or makes mistakes in striving for perfection. On the other hand, where the

* Cp. the Author's essay, "The Aristotelian Concept of *φύσις*," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. VI., No. 1.

The Religious Function of Comedy

Deity is conceived as an omnipotent power working in and with the evolutionary process, the means contradict omnipotence and the result denies, what is contrary to hypothesis, perfection.

Aristotelianism is a much more philosophical doctrine than any of those uncritical compromises which are popularized, as we noted, in poetry by Tennyson and in scientific cosmology by Fiske *et alii*, and which we may here bulk under the term theological evolutionism. For Aristotle's doctrine, which approaches spiritual monism, finds a reasonable explanation of imperfection within a system of perfection. The defect in his doctrine is that, philosophically considered, eternal progress rather than perfectibility is the ideal of *φύσις*. Such a *progressus ad infinitum*, however, is only poetically satisfying; as a process or function of a significantly unitary life, it appears inconsequential and unreal. Reconstructed, however, in terms of objective idealism, Aristotle's doctrine readily offers the most satisfying solution of the problem of evil, both on the side of human sin as such and on the side of the seemingly absurd and brutal sportings of Circumstance. But I am not here concerned with the proof of spiritual monism, or with the origin and function of *τὸ αὐτομάτον* as a cosmological phenomenon. Even if we could see all the "ins-and-outs" of the system by which the Absolute "manages" the universe, we could not comprehend. In these matters agnosticism is the only properly philosophical attitude. Accepting, then, the fact of an imperfect universe, as seen *sub specie temporis*, I hope to reflect from a literary medium an oblique light on the more baffling aspect of evil.

As, according to Aristotle, poetry is more philosophical than history; so, of its two species, genuine comedy is more philosophical than tragedy. Ordinarily viewed,

The Religious Function of Comedy

comedy is accepted as the very antithesis of tragedy in æsthetic dignity, moral substance and spiritual illumination. Yet its metaphysical implications are profounder than those of tragedy. Judged by its ground in reality, comedy has, as much as tragedy, that quality which Aristotle is thought to have attributed solely to the latter, namely, *σπουδή*. And, judged by its function, comedy accomplishes a more natural and pervasive *κάθαρσις* than does tragedy. For the latter effects only a purification of the most idiocentric emotions, but genuine comedy clarifies and frees the religious imagination. Without attempting here any dramatic criticism as such, I proceed to explain, on the basis of Aristotelian philology and dramatic history, the *σπουδή* and *κάθαρσις* of comedy, and to apply the result to the problem of evil on the side of *τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον*.

I. THE COMIC ΣΠΟΥΔΗ.

Aristotle, much more than Plato, is dependent on a careful study of all his works for the true meaning of his doctrine and his language. Only from a study of text after text, and in the light of his philosophic system, shall we see unmistakably that he had a very deliberate regard for the historic process: that he drew no philosophical conclusion and fixed no principle until he had first interrogated the common consciousness. Unlike Plato, he does not keep the "high-priori" road, but examines universal reason wherever envisaged,—in human institutions, beliefs, and language,—that he may supplement a too facile induction or correct a too abstract deduction. This attitude of Aristotle to customs and language is an essential characteristic of his philosophical method, which, it is apparent, the English critics of his *Poetics*, especially the philologists, have not sufficiently

The Religious Function of Comedy

kept in mind. For Aristotle does not hesitate to appropriate the vernacular to philosophical purposes, without thinking it worth while to warn his readers (or hearers) of subtle changes in meaning; now using the same term in its common or historic sense, now in a special or scientific sense, or, again, often with a meaning just on the way from the common to a scientific sense.

The adjective to the noun *σπουδή*, seemingly applied, as some think, to tragedy alone, is a case in point. And, as it happens, Aristotle was very careful, both in the *Poetics* and in the *Ethics*, to distinguish the common meaning of *σπουδαῖος* from its special or philosophical meaning in his system. This he did by using *σπουδαῖος* without any limiting phrase—the bare word itself—when applied in the moral field, or with limiting nouns, phrases and particles when applied to common functions and processes.*

When Aristotle's attitude to language and his use of it in philosophical exposition are thus understood, to credit comedy with *σπουδή* is neither to violate the spirit of the text of the *Poetics*, nor to employ a real paradox. On the other hand, there is overwhelming evidence in Aristotelian philology to show that Butcher and others are guilty of performing a *non-sequitur* in confining the adjective *σπουδαῖα* to an antithesis, on Aristotle's part, between tragedy as "grave and great" and comedy as "light and gay" (*φauλή-γελοία*). The evidence is chiefly in Aristotle's definition of the function of tragedy and in two or three other passages of the *Poetics*. In turning to these passages we must continually keep in mind how Aristotle, without waiting to explain, glides from the common meaning of a term to a

* (1) Moral field—*Eth. Nic.* III. 4. 1113a33; IX. 4. 1166a12; X. 6. 1176b25; cp. *Pol.* IV. (VII.) 13. 1332a7. (2) Common usage—*Eth. Nic.* I. 6. 1098a11; *Poet.* V. 5. 1449b17.

The Religious Function of Comedy

special meaning or to one hovering between the two. To emphasize these shades of meaning, I translate, or rather paraphrase, Aristotle's definition of tragedy, in terms of æsthetics and ethics.

"Tragedy," he says, "is an idealized or imaginative representation (*μίμησις*—æsthetic field) of a *spiritual conflict* (*πράξεως σπουδαίας*, moral field), and of its progress from beginning to end (*τελείας*—moral field); set forth by the dramatist on a scale large enough (*μέγεθος ἐχούσης*—æsthetic field) to give it significance and impressiveness: thus effecting through pity and fear (æsthetically stirred up by the tragic spectacle) the *κάθαρσις* (medical metaphor) proper (*τὴν*—Butcher) of these very emotions" (moral-pathological field).*

First: by *πράξις* Aristotle means, not the bustle of action as a series of outward events—not the "movement" of a play—but the outworking of inner processes to their logical (moral) consequences. The objects of æsthetic representation, he tells us in that peculiar way of his, as if throwing off a careless remark (*Poet.* I. 5. 1447a 28),† are *ἡθῆ*, *πάθη*, and *πράξεις*. Now, these are all psychical manifestations. If, then, *πράξις* is spiritual, necessarily its adjective *σπουδαία* should

* *Poet.* VI. 2. 1449b22—"Ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας, μέγεθος ἐχούσης . . . δι' ἑλπίου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν. In my paraphrase I am careful to bring out the distinction between the moral and æsthetic references, which, as a matter of philology, was first noticed by Reinkens in his *Aristoteles über Kunst, besonders über Tragödie*.

† Observe, e.g., in *Eth. Nic.*, Aristotle's peculiar use of *ἴσως*=not "perhaps," but "no doubt," "there is no doubt." Whenever this word occurs in a proposition Aristotle is not making a careless remark or indulging in rhetorical politeness, but is expressing a positive belief on his part. Cp. his use of *ἐπερ* in the *Met.*="if, as is actually the case."

The Religious Function of Comedy

have a spiritual connotation. It passes comprehension how so excellent a critic as Butcher, who distinctly holds to the psychological reference or content of *πράξις*, can make its qualifying adjective, *σπουδαία*, signify merely a contrast between the material and manner of tragedy and comedy in degree of seriousness. The proper connotation and reference are determined by the meaning of its companion adjective, *τελεία*, and by the fact that in Aristotle's philosophical system *σπουδαία* is the adjective of *ἀρετή*.*

Tragedy is the representation of an action which completes itself (*τελεία*), or, in modern phrase, which proceeds from a beginning through a crisis to a spiritual catastrophe with absolute necessity. The adjective *τελεία* thus defines the nature of *πράξις* more precisely. By itself *πράξις* is a spiritual process; taken, again, with *τελεία*, it appears as a process definitively within the strictly moral field. When, in addition, we know that *σπουδαία*, in the same field, is the proper adjective of *ἀρετή*, it is impossible to understand Aristotle to be doing anything else than defining the essential nature of *tragic action* (*πράξεως σπουδαίας*), namely, as an *inward moral conflict*.† This is a psychological distinction, whereas when Aristotle contrasts tragedy with comedy as being *φauλή* or *γελοία*, he has in mind the old Attic and Aristophanic comedy, which he censures, and the distinction is objective, referring to the structure and manner of low or political comedy. When he approves comedy, as he several times does, he distinctly

* See *Categories*, VIII. 6. 10b7. Cp. *Topica*, V. 3. 131b2.

† Cp. Brander Matthews, *The Development of the Drama*, p. 20: "By action Aristotle does not mean mere movement—the fictitious bustle often found in melodrama and in farce. Perhaps the Greek critic intended 'action' to be interpreted 'struggle.'"

The Religious Function of Comedy

refers to the Middle Comedy which closed in Menander, and positively credits it, as we shall see, with *σπουδή*.^{*} As a fundamental distinction between the two species of drama, we may, then, note that in Aristotle's instances, *σπουδαία* is subjective, while *φανυλή* or *γελοία* is objective.

The adjective *σπουδαία*, in its reference to tragic action, is quite untranslatable: such terms as "serious" or "grave and great" suggest easily a contrast with low or satiric comedy on the side of its manner or structure, and prevent a definitive spiritual reference. The contrast between tragedy as "grave and great" and comedy as "light and gay" is somewhat assisted by Aristotle himself in asserting that the ideal tragic hero must be "one who is highly renowned and prosperous—a personage like Œdipus, Thyestes and other illustrious men of such families."[†]

But if distinctions such as these were the root meaning of *σπουδαία* (*πράξις*) in Aristotle's mind, then Achilles would have been a hero fit for tragic action, whereas the truly tragic hero in Homer is Ajax, whose great soul, as we see it in Sophocles' play of that name, was destroyed by the meanest of human vices, envy. Is not Odysseus, too, a fit subject for "great and grave" action? Yet if the *Odyssey* were dramatically treated, it would become a romantic comedy, because its end, despite the slaughter of the suitors, is joy and peace—all discords are "resolved." Similarly, could the dramatic material and episodes be more serious, or grave and great, than in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, *Two*

^{*} *Poet.* V. 1-3. 1449a30—1449b5; IX. 5. 1451b10. The failure to distinguish when Aristotle is referring to the Old comedy and when to the Middle comedy is at the bottom of the *non-sequitur* noted in Butcher's otherwise admirable criticism.

[†] *Poet.* XIII. 3. 1453a10.

The Religious Function of Comedy

Gentlemen of Verona, Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, or Moliere's *Tartuffe*? Yet, for one reason or another, they are to be classed as comedies.

The truth is that in the reference to the ideal tragic hero Aristotle is not making a generalization from the practice of the Greek tragedians as against that of Aristophanes and the lampooners, contrasting the one as "grave and great" and the other as "light and gay." He could not be guilty of so poor an induction, so obvious a *non-sequitur*. On the contrary, he is quite justly making a generalization from the nature of society in the Greek "city-state." The possibility of significant moral action did not exist for the helots and the aliens. Under the social and political conditions of Athens only "citizens" had the necessary spiritual gifts, or culture, or power which could make possible and significant—universalize the meaning of—a moral struggle with outer circumstance or inner propensity. In this matter, then, the tragic hero is not tragic because he is illustrious, or grave and great, but because his soul is an *imperium in imperio* wherein are gathered great forces to do battle. Once more, then, our fundamental distinction obtains in Aristotle's own doctrine:—*σπουδαία* has always a subjective reference; "grave and great" in tragedy, "light and gay" in comedy, are objective distinctions.

Negatively viewed, there is no evidence in Aristotle's language or instances that in his celebrated definition of tragedy he had in mind any contrast with comedy. So far as this definition is concerned, comedy equally with tragedy may have *σπουδή*. But I am not interested in establishing a case of "not proven." I must show positively that Aristotle credits comedy with *σπουδή* and define its nature. As a matter of fact, Aristotle asserts that poetry not only is more "philosophical" (*φιλο-*

The Religious Function of Comedy

σοφώτερον) than history, but is also σπουδαιότερον; and, in explanation, appeals not to tragedy but to comedy.* In this case he cites not the old raucous political comedy or the lyrical burlesques of Aristophanes, which dealt in invective and personal attack, but the Middle Comedy, which aimed to represent generalized *types* of humanity—faults and foibles, to be sure, but still types. Students of the *Poetics* should constantly keep in mind, in their reading, that whenever Aristotle disparages comedy, as he does in the case of the old lampooners, he is criticizing the manner and structure of the art which is only a caricature of particularities; and that whenever he approves comedy, as he does in the case of Middle Comedy, he does so because it envisages the universal. Now, let us note that the Middle Comedy, as contrasted with the older satiric or political comedy, is φιλοσοφώτερον (sc. *ἱστορίας*) because it represents humanity in type; and it is σπουδαιότερον because, like tragedy, it gives us not detached fragments of facts, but an *idealized representation of experience*. The philosophical comedy of Menander, the romantic comedy of Shakespeare, the social comedy of Moliere, if they use the typical foibles or failings of mankind, yet represent these things with all the beauty of plot, characterization and dramatic movement conspicuous in the best tragedies. Frequently they delineate human motives with high imaginative vision and tragic seriousness. In the work of these great three—Menander, Shakespeare, and Moliere—comedy is not malign, but kindly, because it divines behind the incongruities of human nature the “power not ourselves” that sports through our virtue or sin, wisdom or folly. The *spiritual* truth behind the

* *Poet.* IX. 3. 1451b5. See also his express mention of Crates and the change, approved by Aristotle, which Crates wrought in method of comedy—*Poet.* V. 2. 1449b6.

The Religious Function of Comedy

phenomena of virtue or folly—this is the *σπουδή* of dramatic art. And comedy, because as much as tragedy it affords us an idealized representation of experience, is equally with tragedy *φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον*—more spiritually significant than history or any other species of pure literature. How so, we shall see in a moment.

II. THE COMIC *ΚΑΘΑΡΣΙΣ*.

Perhaps a more significant term in Aristotle's definition, for our purpose, is the word *τελεία*, because through it we differentiate the comic *σπουδή* from the tragic, and pass to the *καθάρσις* of genuine comedy. Tragic action, as we paraphrased it from Aristotle's definition, is an action that "completes itself" (*πραξέως τελείας*)—that proceeds from beginning to end with inexorable necessity and finality, even unto the death of the hero. Now death, because it is the ultimate fact of life from the phenomenal point of view, is the sign of the remorseless sway of moral law. Under the endless half-views and confusedness of real life we fail to perceive the sway of moral law with proper impressiveness. But through tragic art we see, with lurid significance, the hard saying—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And as outward death, phenomenally viewed, is the "end" of life, and, in art, the sign of spiritual death, the tragic dramatist utters a still harder saying—"There is no room for repentance." Tragedy has no reference or meaning beyond phenomena. Sin issues in death, and death ends all. The sinner cannot come back from the grave; there can be no repentance and no salvation. Œdipus at Colonnus passing his latter days, after his sin, blind but at peace, as if forgiven—such a spectacle is not embraced in the conspectus of tragic art; nor is

The Religious Function of Comedy

the spectacle of Marguerite in *Faust*, whom voices from above proclaim to be saved by a spiritual victory through repentance. For Sophocles and Goethe thus to add an epilogue exploiting the noumenal meaning of things is to employ the method of melodrama. It is very human, tender and exalting, perhaps; but no such specifically Christian idea is permissible within the province of tragic art.

But if the tragic dramatist must not pass beyond phenomena, equally the worker in comedy may not do so. Yet, while this is true, the point of view of the comic dramatist would not be possible, except to the vision which perceives in the noumenal world the ground for pure laughter. The genuine comic spirit sees the incongruities of human life and character, and is incited to poke fun at them, only because at the same time it also divines their ultimate fulfilment in a universal harmony. Comedy deals only with phenomena, but the source of its inspiration, its ground for laughter, is in noumenal reality. The fatality of human conduct; the futility of human conduct—these to the genuine comic spirit are but adumbrations of a noumenal world, not really malign and brutal, but human and kindly. It is essential, then, that the comic *σπουδή* shall idealize human experience, so as to free the heart and imagination from all obsessions of tragic finality.

No doubt it is something like this matter of finality in tragic art that they have in mind who contrast tragedy with comedy from the side of seriousness, or who conceive tragedy to work within the realm of causality, while comedy works in the realm of chance, or who view tragedy as more real—i.e., truer to life—than comedy. But for ourselves, basing our view both on Aristotelian philology and on the history of dramatic art, we may observe that comedy is equally with tragedy grounded in

The Religious Function of Comedy

human nature, that the dominant note of tragedy is finality, while in comedy it is contingency, and that the appeal of the one is to the emotions, while the appeal of the other is to the imagination. In short, tragedy is moral or philosophical; comedy is metaphysical or religious.

III. APPLICATION TO ΤΙΧΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΑΤΤΟΜΑΤΟΝ.

We are now prepared to pass to the comic *κάθαρσις* and its application to the problem of evil. The *κάθαρσις* of the two species of drama differs both by way of their reference and their faculties. According to Aristotle himself, the tragic *κάθαρσις* cannot escape the personal, subjective reference. It might be supposed that the æsthetic representation of the tragic struggle would altogether cast out fear—of the law. On the contrary, the tragic spectacle of the sinning soul enmeshed by his own deeds in the toils of the law only deepens and intensifies the terrible apprehension of it. The vivid impression of the sway of moral law only causes the spectator to reflect too narrowly on himself and his helpless finitude. The terror of the law remains active and insistent, and thus prevents full sanity of view. This is all the more inevitable because the faculty which perceives it belongs to that part of our nature which cannot objectify its impressions or processes.* The tragic *κάθαρσις* is too idiocentric to be more than incomplete and temporary. Comedy, on the other hand, affords a complete *κάθαρσις*, not by denying the validity of moral

* For the psychology of the faculty of fear and pity see James, *Text-book of Psychology*, chapter on the Emotions. For the significance of objectification of emotion in æsthetic theory see Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, Part I., § 10.

The Religious Function of Comedy

law, but by transcending the tragic point of view, by subsuming even law under a larger unity. The cynicism which laughs at human frailty *per se* has not the genuinely comic point of view; the bitter reprisals of the satirist spring from an equally narrow conspectus. The cynic and the satirist, along with the moralist, look at human virtue or human folly in themselves, never in their total relations. But genuine comedy views both virtue and folly in their relation to a background in reality. And because its faculty is the imagination, it transforms men's total outlook. The change in the *Weltanschauung* lifts men above the earthly horizon, and works in them sanity of vision and peace of mind. And so from this point of view we can at least conceive how the Absolute, whose life is the reality of the universe, may regard that aspect of the world which seems to mock men with malign sportiveness, under a form akin to what we express by comedy. And we, if we could but see *sub specie æternitatis*, should find in circumstance and fate, in virtue and folly, and even in our own defeat and death, room for the pure laughter of the spirit.

But now just this, from the point of view of spiritual monism, must be our solution of *τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον*. The essence of the tragic point of view is to consider the phenomenal world as the "really real." *Τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον* appear as breaches of the order and laws of society and of the really real. Now, these mathematical laws of nature and the social realm the common-sense man accepts as the final and everlasting aspect of reality. But there is, as we saw, a subjective disproof of their absolute origin and validity in the fact that the tragic representation of them so deepens and intensifies the terrible apprehension of the sphere and sway of law that the minds of men are blinded to the workings of a deeper system in a sphere of freedom. A

The Religious Function of Comedy

just and sane view of the universe requires that we regard ourselves as its offspring and that we look out upon it, not through the petty windows of our definitively emotional nature, but through the organ of universal vision, the religious imagination. This is the faculty of the genuinely comic vision. The essence of its view is to consider fixed law, all forms of space and time, continuity and contingency, as the phenomenal aspect of a circumstantial area of experience, and the whole play of circumstance as evidence that our experience is but a drop in the ocean of the Absolute experience. To the comic vision what excites pure laughter is not the incongruities or contradictions *per se* in mankind, but man's profound lack of good sense about his relations to universal reality. The essentially ridiculous is the fact that even with all his terrene methodological apparatus—his system of laws, tabulations, formulæ—the great, wide universe defies man, remains out of harmony with his prepared order.

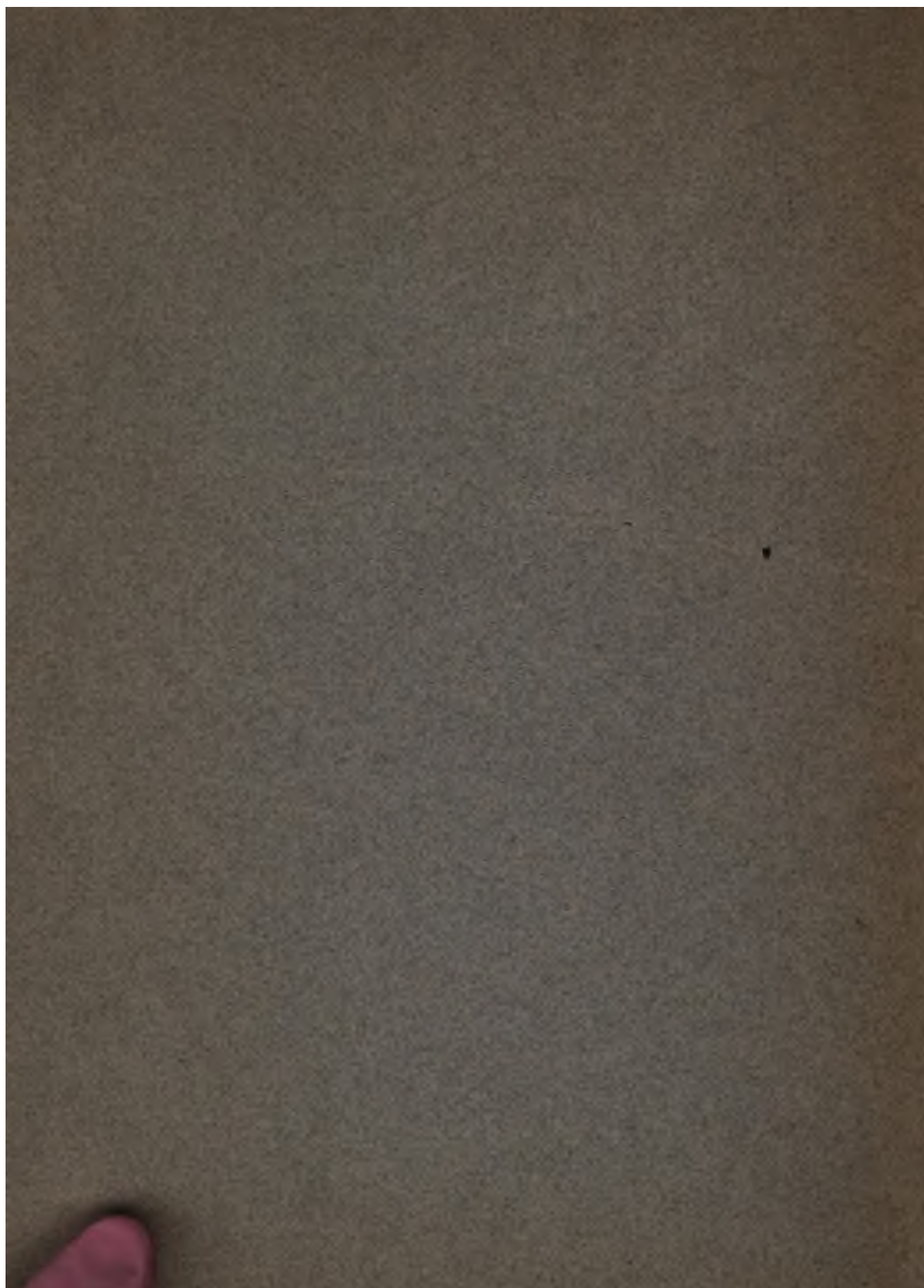
After all, then, we must go back again to Aristotle. For, in his view, *τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον* are *στερήσεις* of intelligence (*διάνοια*) and nature (*φύσις*), not active agencies in the universe, over and above and totally inobedient to law, not a Satanic power equal with and defying Providence, but merely phenomena which the human mind cannot fit to the mould of its own narrow configurations. About the objective constitution of the processes which correspond to these *στερήσεις* we must forever remain agnostic. But on the subjective side they are phenomena for which we have not yet found the formula. Still, even if we never discover such a formula, we should not perceive their evil aspect if we did not at the same time divine their ultimate harmony somehow in reality.

It is thus that the comic attitude annihilates in us the absolute sense of the congruous. That men should mis-

The Religious Function of Comedy

take the place of their systems in the whole is the greatest incongruity of all. *Τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον* are not more out of place—not more incongruous—for our systems than the latter themselves are as formulæ for the Absolute Experience. Genuine comedy, then, completely annihilates that sense of the congruous which is the mark of our finitude. Whether or not, as has been suggested, we have a right to regard the vision of the rich, incongruous Show as proof of the existence of a beneficent Showman behind it all, at any rate, despite misfortune, defeat, and death, we may always have the delight of pure laughter—if we apprehend reality with the religious imagination, the faculty of the genuine Comic Spirit.








**This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.**

**A fine of five cents a day is incurred
by retaining it beyond the specified
time.**

Please return promptly.

DUE MAY 21 1927

igious function of comedy.
r Library 005821614

2044 085 101 871

